How to Build a Non-Toxic Community: Part 2

Community Procrow Jan 23, 2020

Welcome to “How to Build a Non-Toxic Community: Part 2”

This blog is a continuation of last’s weeks blog “How to Build a Non-Toxic Community: Part 1”

In this follow up, we’ll continue to discuss Community Rules, the importance of feedback, transparency, and some tricks of the trade.

Introducing community rules

The rules you choose are going to be different for every community. It is important to provide rules that encompass what you *should* do and what you

shouldn't do. . An example of a less effective rule is, "Be excellent to each other." While it is a cute rule, it is ultimately an ineffective rule because "Be excellent" means something different to each person, and different things in different contexts.

Also, remember your audience. If you ran a community that centered around the video game Shadow of War, a mature violent fantasy RPG, then naturally your community will be using more violent language. Compare this to a community centered around kid–friendly video game drawings. "Be Excellent to each other" in the Shadow of War community may allow a certain level of hyperbolic violent humor like "I'm going to take your head!" That may be unwelcome in a kid friendly community.

To avoid unclear rules, avoid leaving them up for interpretation. A rule like "Use kind language" or "Use language only featured in G rated movies" provides much clearer indications on how to engage, rather than "Be excellent."

Enforcing the rules

Rules should be equally enforced for everyone. If they aren't, it should be clearly called out as to WHY. A rule like "No posting Youtube links" for the community, but allowing the main content to post their videos makes sense. However, i should still be clearly explained why that it is the case. We recommend these exceptions be minimal, as you are the representative of what it is to be in your community. If you do a bunch of things that community members are not allowed to do, they'll either be encouraged to break the rules to act more like you, or feel the gap between your privilege and theirs.

This includes minimizing "favorites". Favorites here are defined as "people who don't needs to follow the rules." This will damage a community because it creates a privilege distribution.

A way to avoid this and still have favorites would be to create a new role. "Locals" or "Regulars" are non–mod community member roles that are often given more privileges. They have a clear path of growth from being a regular community member, and often have more responsibilities as well.

Transparency and feedback

Once your roles and rules are established and clearly expressed, test them within your community. Sometimes the roles and rules work alright, and sometimes they cause problems. Getting it perfect the first time out is not your goal. Having acceptable rules and roles and then working them into better ones after listening to your community, *is* your goal.

A rule of thumb….

It is easier to relax a rule, than to make it more strict.

With that said, there will be some incremental shifts as you find the right ruleset. Sometimes those shifts come from discussions with mods on HOW to enforce a rule, and then there is a clarification added to a rule. Those clarifications should be posted with the rule/role or the rule/role being reworded to fit the extra meaning.

Moderators have a great pulse on the community as they are enforcing rules and explaining roles. Use that feedback, and empower your mods to share their thoughts with you.

Some Extra Tricks

Sharpen the Saw

Take breaks from the community and sharpen the saw. There is a story about a carpenter named Cory. On their first day of work, Cory was 150% faster than even the next best carpenter. The second day, Cory was working at 90% of what the best could do, and on the third day, Cory could only manage 30%. Frustrated at their plummet in productivity, Cory asked the best carpenter “How do you maintain 100% everyday?” to which the best replied, “Have you taken the time to sharpen your saw? Can’t be 100% with poorly treated tools.”

Keep your brain sharp, and take the breaks you need.

Beware Negativity Bias

Record your successes and make them into something solid that exists outside your computer. Humans naturally give more credence to negativity, it is known as a negativity bias. It is possible to get a negative view of the community, when it is in fact healthy and successful. Having something solid is a great motivator and reminder about why we do what we do.

On how to Moderate

Whenever there is a need to moderate, take disagreements with community members to back channels or DMs. You should avoid arguments in public spaces. Doing this can prevent a mob mentality where, even if other community members don't feel as strongly about the discussion, they may be more likely to pile on and create a toxic environment for the team. This pile on could be in support of you, or the community member who broke the rule. Either way it creates a toxic environment, don't allow the community to gang up on anyone.

It is important to remove bad actors quickly. Bad actors prevent good actors from joining your community and bad actors also scare away sponsors or recruiters who are looking to hire you. Sponsors and recruiters often lurk in communities so you won't know when they are there. Thus you won't be able to have everyone "be good".

It is important to remove bad moderators too. They are your helpers, and how they act reflects on you.

How to Pick a Moderator

Take a tip from Mr. Rogers and "look for the helpers". The good moderators identify themselves because they greet people as they enter, provide you positive feedback, and provide emotional support. Sometimes these people will offer their help as a mod, and sometimes you will need to offer it to them first. Keep a list of interested moderators and monitor the names on that list. If you see moderators

behaving in ways you want to encourage, then those individuals are good candidates for mods.

There are some red flags to look out for. Mods who disagree with your ideals, but are willing to enforce your rules are risky. They may like to be moderators for the power, rather than for helping the community. Good moderators want to support your ideals and help the community grow, more than they like the authority.

Look out for moderators who assume the worst or are negative about people in the community. It is difficult to ascertain intent, and good moderators will avoid making judgements when there is little or no evidence. Bad moderators will often assume malice in rule breakings, when ignorance is just as possible. It is possible to have moderators who are too loose on issues, and that can hurt the community. However, strict rule adherence will guide your moderators and so as long as they follow the rules, a loose moderator is still effective. A moderator who sees the worse though, will find ways to make the rules apply to back up their desired ban/timeout actions.

The final red flag is related to people asking to be a mod, but are rarely seen in the community. Provide a clear path on how to be a moderator in your community, and hold people accountable to that path. Users that assume the worst or are negative about people in the community.

The benefit of a small community to a Sponsor or Recruiter

Small influencers with a good community, have a higher conversion rate than big influencers with a good community. This means that a company will often have a cheaper “cost per conversion” or simply, spend less money with a smaller creator and then get more out it, than they would with a big creator. This makes moderation still important in small communities because bad actors and good actors are much more apparent in smaller communities.

The reason why there is better cost per conversion with small communities, is because bigger communities and their larger audiences feel less connected because of their scale. This lower connectedness lowers the conversion percentage. A common marketing strategy is to to sponsor small influencers over big ones, because you get similar final conversion numbers for less money, and some of the small influenceers could go big.

I (ProCrow) was hired to work as the Monolith Productions Community Specialist of Livestreaming when I had under 3,000 subscribers on Youtube. It wasn’t the size of my community, but the skill I presented in content and community management, that influenced the decision. No matter your size, your community is valuable and should be a non-toxic community.